SUMMER
FLOWERS
Bryant.

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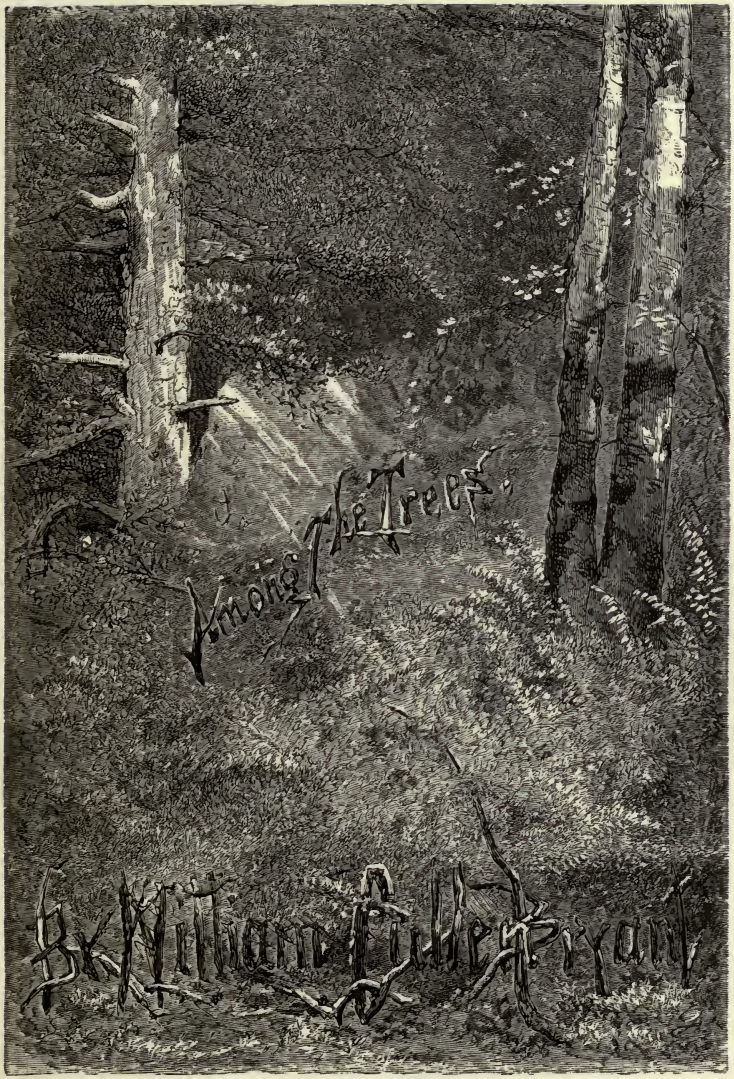
AMONG THE TREES


Among The Trees
By William Cullen Bryant

AMONG THE TREES

BY

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

Illustrated

FROM DESIGNS BY JERVIS McENTEE, ENGRAVED BY HARLEY

NEW YORK
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
FOURTH AVENUE AND TWENTY-THIRD STREET

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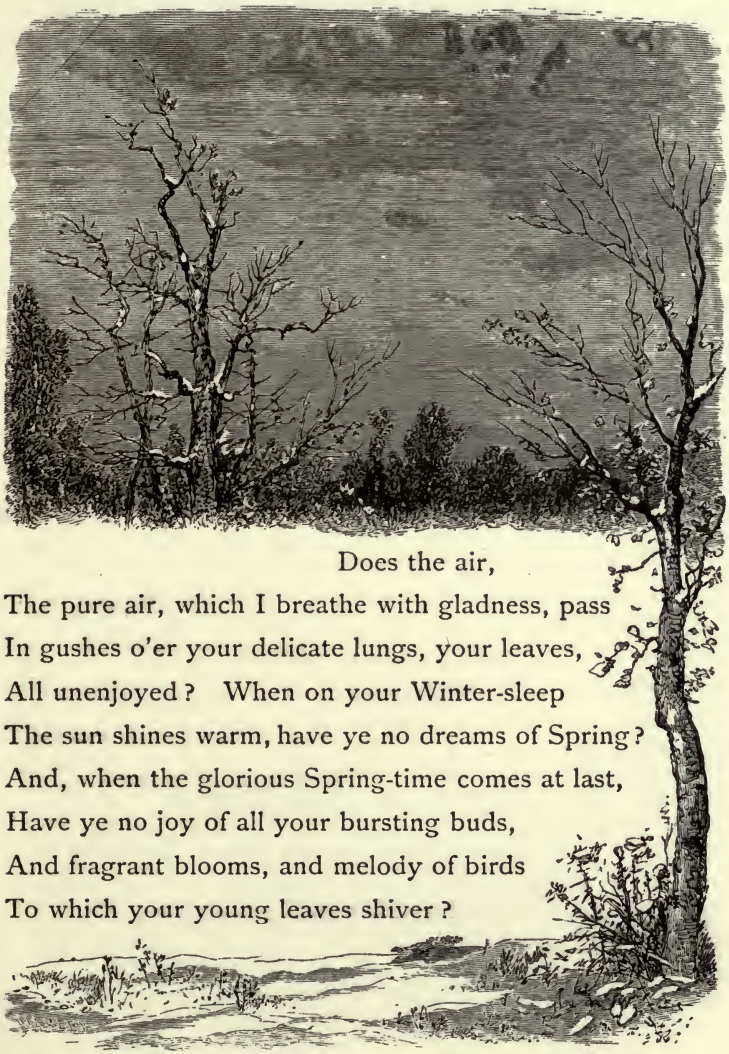
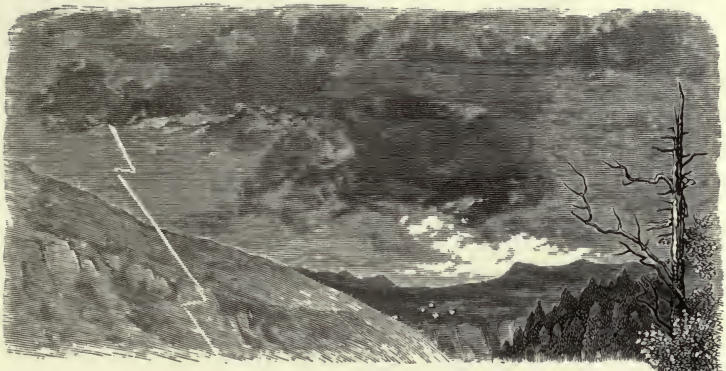
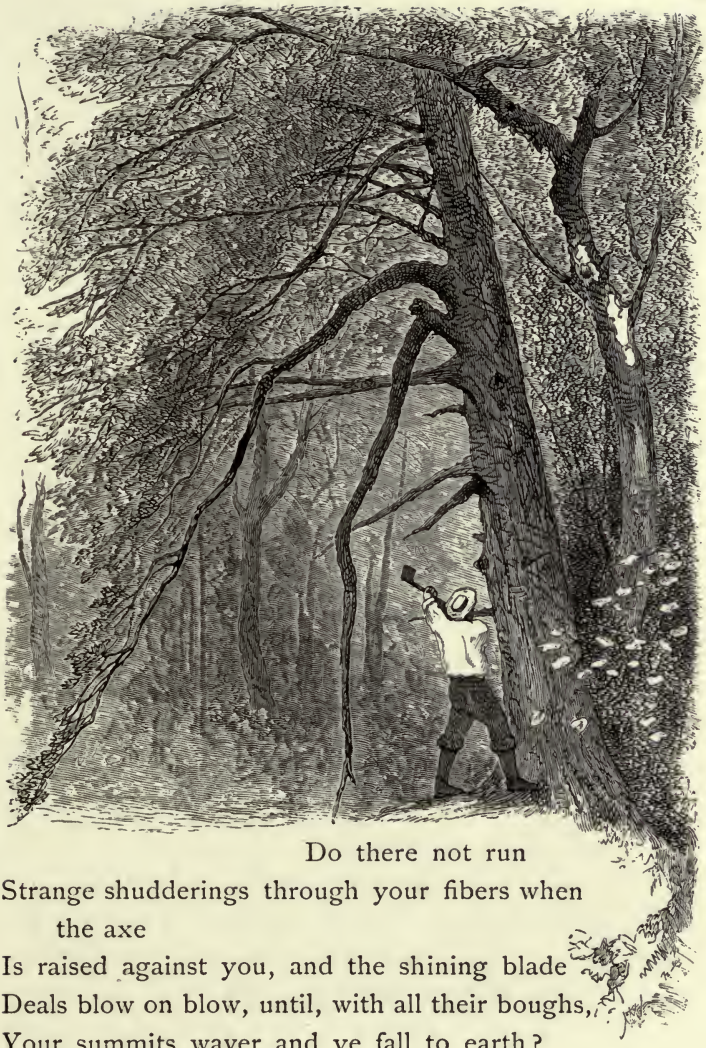
OH ye who love to overhang the springs,
And stand by running waters, ye whose boughs
Make beautiful the rocks o'er which they play,
Who pile with foliage the great hills, and rear
A paradise upon the lonely plain,
Trees of the forest and the open field!
Have ye no sense of being?



Does the air,
The pure air, which I breathe with gladness, pass
In gushes o'er your delicate lungs, your leaves,
All unenjoyed? When on your Winter-sleep
The sun shines warm, have ye no dreams of Spring?
And, when the glorious Spring-time comes at last,
Have ye no joy of all your bursting buds,
And fragrant blooms, and melody of birds
To which your young leaves shiver?



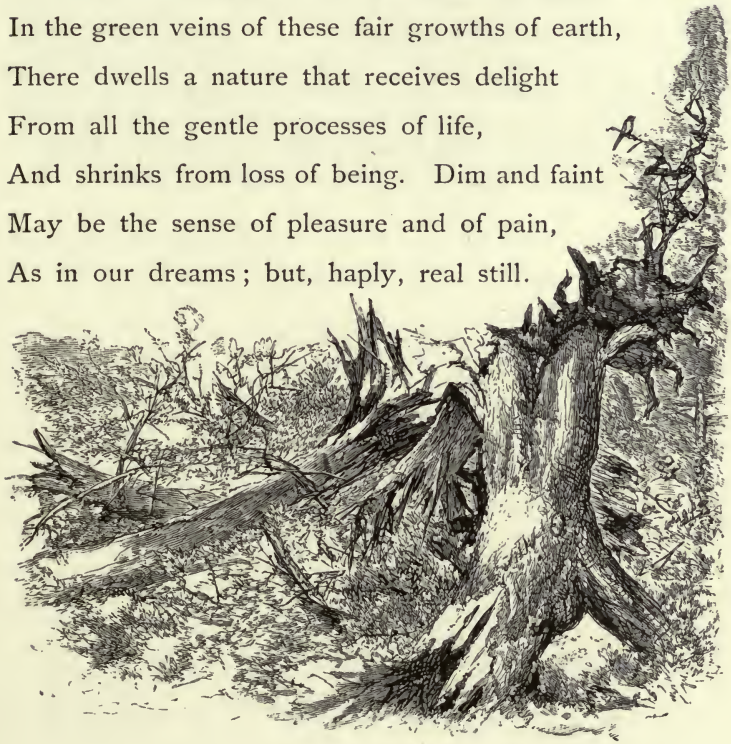
Do ye strive
And wrestle with the wind, yet know it not ?
Feel ye no glory in your strength when he,
The exhausted Blusterer, flies beyond the hills,
And leaves you stronger yet ? Or have ye not
A sense of loss when he has stripped your leaves,
Yet tender, and has splintered your fair boughs ?
Does the loud bolt that smites you from the cloud,
And rends you, fall unfelt ?



Do there not run
Strange shudderings through your fibers when
the axe
Is raised against you, and the shining blade
Deals blow on blow, until, with all their boughs,
Your summits waver and ye fall to earth?

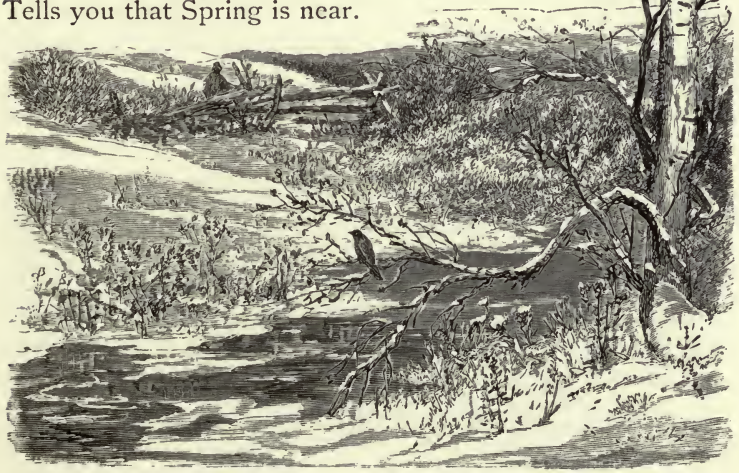
Know ye no sadness when the hurricane
Has swept the wood and snapped its sturdy stems
Asunder, or has wrenched, from out the soil,
The mightiest with their circles of strong roots,
And piled the ruin all along his path?

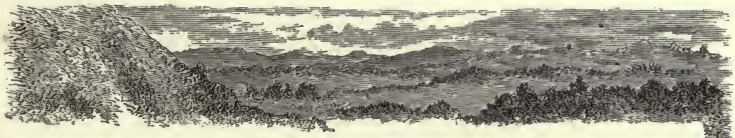
Nay, doubt we not that under the rough rind,
In the green veins of these fair growths of earth,
There dwells a nature that receives delight
From all the gentle processes of life,
And shrinks from loss of being. Dim and faint
May be the sense of pleasure and of pain,
As in our dreams; but, haply, real still.



Our sorrows touch you not. We watch beside
The beds of those who languish or who die,
And minister in sadness, while our hearts
Offer perpetual prayer for life and ease
And health to the belovèd sufferers.
But ye, while anxious fear and fainting hope
Are in our chambers, ye rejoice without.
The funeral goes forth; a silent train
Moves slowly from the desolate home; our hearts
Are breaking as we lay away the loved,
Whom we shall see no more, in their last rest,
Their little cells within the burial-place.

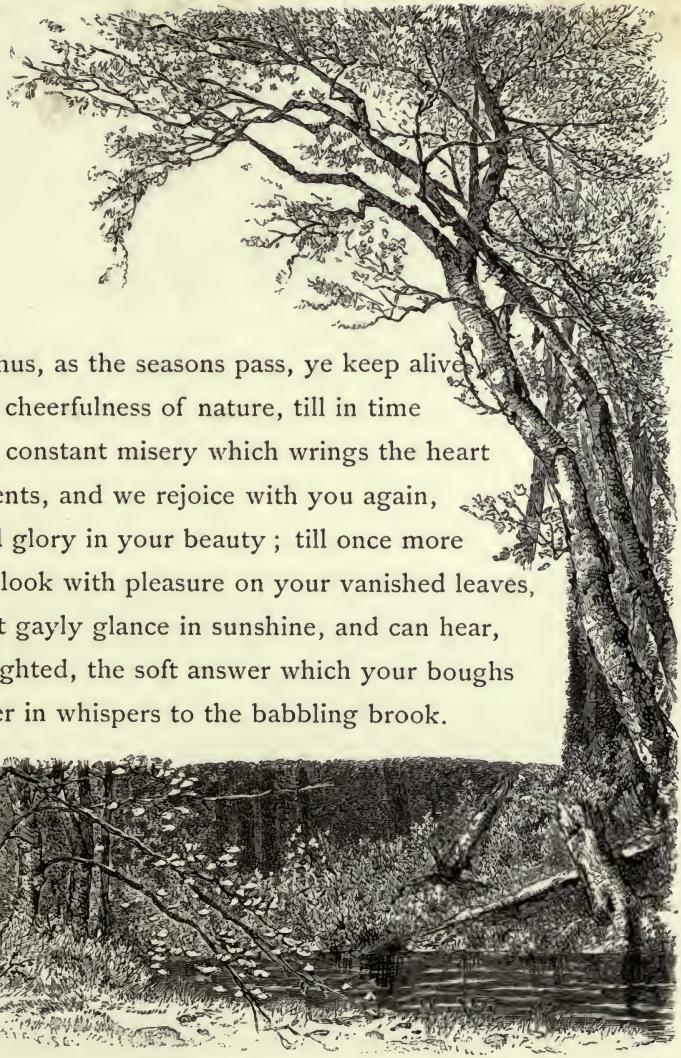
Ye have no part in this distress ; for still
The February sunshine steeps your boughs
And tints the buds and swells the leaves within ;
While the song-sparrow, warbling from her perch,
Tells you that Spring is near.



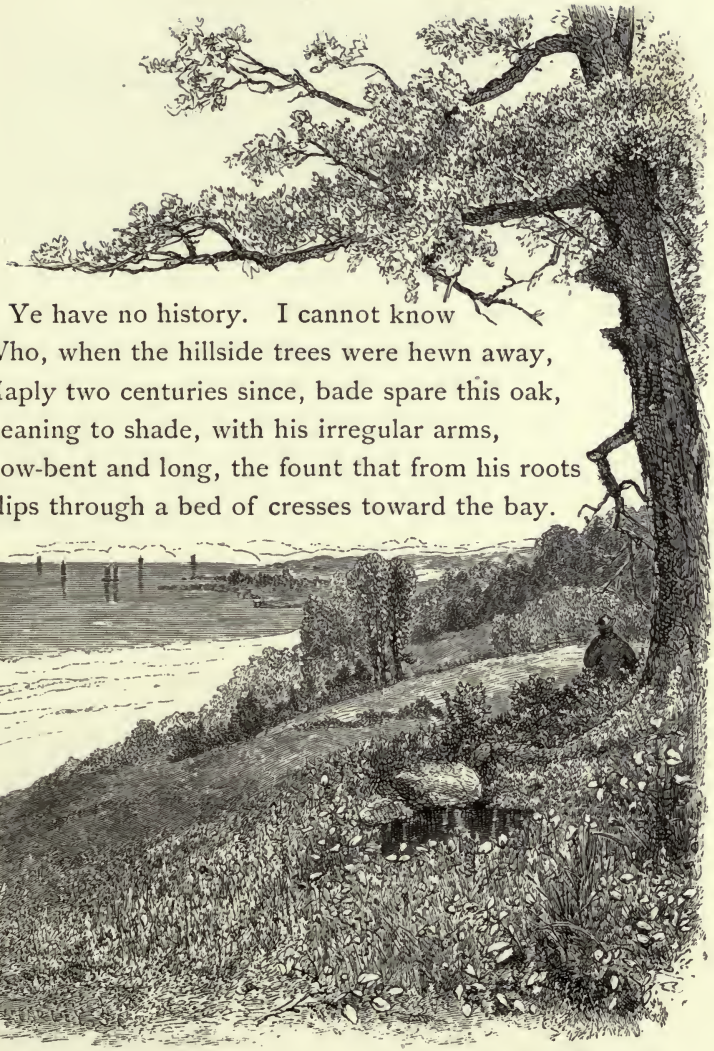


The wind of May
Is sweet with breath of orchards, in whose boughs
The bees and every insect of the air
Make a perpetual murmur of delight,
And by whose flowers the humming-bird hangs poised
In air, and draws their sweets and darts away.
The linden, in the fervors of July,
Hums with a louder concert. When the wind
Sweeps the broad forest in its summer prime,
As when some master-hand exulting sweeps
The keys of some great organ, ye give forth
The music of the woodland depths, a hymn
Of gladness and of thanks.

The hermit-thrush
Pipes his sweet note to make your arches ring.
The faithful robin, from the wayside elm,
Carols all day to cheer his sitting mate.
And when the Autumn comes, the kings of earth,
In all their majesty, are not arrayed
As ye are, clothing the broad mountain-side,
And spotting the smooth vales with red and
gold.
While, swaying to the sudden breeze, ye fling
Your nuts to earth, and the brisk squirrel
comes
To gather them, and barks with childish glee,
And scampers with them to his hollow oak.



Thus, as the seasons pass, ye keep alive
The cheerfulness of nature, till in time
The constant misery which wrings the heart
Relents, and we rejoice with you again,
And glory in your beauty ; till once more
We look with pleasure on your vanished leaves,
That gayly glance in sunshine, and can hear,
Delighted, the soft answer which your boughs
Utter in whispers to the babbling brook.



Ye have no history. I cannot know
Who, when the hillside trees were hewn away,
Haply two centuries since, bade spare this oak,
Leaning to shade, with his irregular arms,
Low-bent and long, the fount that from his roots
Slips through a bed of cresses toward the bay.

I know not who, but thank him that he left
The tree to flourish where the acorn fell,
And join these later days to that far time
While yet the Indian hunter drew the bow
In the dim woods, and the white woodman first
Opened these fields to sunshine, turned the soil
And strewed the wheat. An unremembered Past
Broods, like a presence, 'mid the long gray boughs
Of this old tree, which has outlived so long
The fitting generations of mankind.

Ye have no history. I ask in vain
Who planted on the slope this lofty group
Of ancient pear-trees that with spring-time burst
Into such breadth of bloom. One bears a scar
Where the quick lightning scored its trunk, yet still
It feels the breath of Spring, and every May
Is white with blossoms. Who it was that laid
Their infant roots in earth, and tenderly
Cherished the delicate sprays, I ask in vain,
Yet bless the unknown hand to which I owe
This annual festival of bees, these songs
Of birds within their leafy screen, these shouts
Of joy from children gathering up the fruit
Shaken in August from the willing boughs.

Ye that my hands have planted, or have spared,
Beside the way, or in the orchard-ground,
Or in the open meadow, ye whose boughs
With every summer spread a wider shade,
Whose herd in coming years shall lie at rest
Beneath your noontide shelter?

Who shall pluck
Your ripened fruit? who grave, as was the wont
Of simple pastoral ages, on the rind
Of my smooth beeches some belovèd name?
Idly I ask; yet may the eyes that look
Upon you, in your later, nobler growth,
Look also on a nobler age than ours;

An age when, in the eternal strife between
Evil and Good, the Power of Good shall win
A grander mastery; when kings no more
Shall summon millions from the plough to learn
The trade of slaughter, and of populous realms
Make camps of war; when in our younger land
The hand of ruffian Violence, that now
Is insolently raised to smite, shall fall
Unnerved before the calm rebuke of law,
And Fraud, his sly confederate shrink, in shame,
Back to his covert, and forego his prey.

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